

# Pioneer Day

Pioneer Day is one of the major holidays for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Church) and occurs annually on July 24<sup>th</sup>. It celebrates the arrival of Brigham Young (the successor of Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church) to Salt Lake Valley with his followers on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1847. Pioneer Day has been celebrated since July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1849.

Throughout the early nineteenth century, members of the Church faced persecution in their settlements in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. As a result, they were forced to leave their homes and flee to the West. The Church pioneers traveled almost 1,300 miles for nearly 18 months until they gained shelter and safety in Utah. This journey was extremely challenging, and many settlers became ill or died. This holiday recognizes the pioneers' flight from persecution and their resulting safety in Utah.

## **The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," is often shorted to the "LDS Church" and popularly known as Mormonism, although the Church prefers to be referred to by its official name. The term "Mormon" originates from *The Book of Mormon*, which was published in 1830 and is considered by the church to be scripture, along with the Bible.

According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2013, about 2% of American adults identify as Mormons. 74% of U.S. Mormons live in the West, with 39% of U.S. Mormons living in Utah.<sup>1</sup>

The religious beliefs of the Church are based on the doctrine taught by founder Joseph Smith, and the succeeding leaders of the church, are summarized in the Thirteen Articles of Faith. Members of the Church view the life of humans as the time when one must choose whether to accept or reject the teachings of God and Jesus Christ. The relationship with God is very personal, and followers believe that God is concerned with all aspects of their daily lives. Mormons value the connection between all humans, as embodied by marriage and family, and they believe there is a responsibility to be an ethical, honorable person. Church members will sometimes refer to their church as "restored," because they view the church's teachings as true Christianity. Mormons believe that salvation is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ combined with good works, and nearly 97% of Mormons identify their religion as a Christian religion.<sup>2</sup>

The church teaches that God reveals truth to humanity through living prophets and apostles, beginning with Joseph Smith and continuing to the current prophet, Russell M. Nelson. There is no professional clergy within Mormonism, so local men and women volunteer in capacities ranging from congregational leadership to teaching classes to missionary work. Only men are ordained to the priesthood in the Church, but women also participate extensively as church members and leaders. As a result, the church has a strong sense of community and high level of volunteerism and commitment.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/07/24/utah-mormons-celebrate-pioneer-day/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## How Will Pioneer Day Affect the Workplace?

Pioneer Day is an official state and church holiday in Utah, so county offices (except emergency services), educational institutions, and many businesses will close. In addition to its cultural significance for Mormons, Pioneer Day marks the founding of the state of Utah and is therefore a state holiday. Pioneer Day may also be celebrated by Church members outside of Utah in neighboring states where Mormons originally settled, such as Idaho, Arizona, and California. In recent years, Pioneer Day has increasingly been informally celebrated by Church communities outside the United States, particularly in countries with large Mormon populations, such as Mexico, Brazil, the Philippines, and Chile.<sup>3</sup>

Many Church members and residents of Utah celebrate Pioneer Day through parades, fireworks, rodeos, festivals, theater and musical events, and excursions with family and friends. The day is often marked by sunrise services and Old West reenactments. Though it is not forbidden to attend work on Pioneer Day, individuals may request time off to participate in these activities. There is no specific religious obligation associated with the holiday. Given the breadth of ways individuals throughout the world may recognize or celebrate Pioneer Day, always remember to keep an open mind and check with employees about their specific needs.

### Acknowledging Pioneer Day

More and more, we see companies providing educational resources to acknowledge a range of diverse holidays, holy days and religious festivals, including lesser-known holidays such as Pioneer Day. Holidays present an excellent opportunity for employers to support their religiously diverse employees and customers and reinforce their reputation as leaders in Diversity and Inclusion.

It is important to note that a 2011 survey conducted by Pew found that 62% of Mormons in the United States believe that Americans know little or nothing about Mormonism.<sup>4</sup> Respectful understanding and flexibility around Pioneer Day in the workplace can serve as one small step in acknowledging and respecting Mormons and their traditions, both in the United States and throughout the world.

### Greetings

If you would like to recognize the holiday with your colleagues and friends, it is appropriate to greet them with a simple “Happy Pioneer Day.”

**For more useful information on world religions, subscribe to Tanenbaum’s online resource, [Religion at Work: A \(Human\) Resource](#). Visit the Tanenbaum [Workplace Resources](#) page for additional Tanenbaum fact sheets and contact Tanenbaum at [workplacediversity@tanenbaum.org](mailto:workplacediversity@tanenbaum.org) with questions.**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/07/24/utah-mormons-celebrate-pioneer-day/>